

Rare Ceramic Bangles from Borneo

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AN EARLIER note (Harrison 1968a) described and illustrated the first porcelain arm-bangle recorded from Borneo. This piece was collected in a Land Dayak longhouse near Kuching, Southwest Sarawak, by Wilhelm G. Solheim II, who kindly donated it to the Sarawak Museum.

I suggested that this then unique specimen might have come over from Southeast Borneo (Indonesian Kalimantan), the premigration homeland of these people (Harrison 1968a: 135). Some substance is now given to this view by the discovery, from some 150 miles away (overland) in the middle Kapuas, of two closely similar, heavily crackled, whiteish-glazed ceramic bangles (Pl. I). The author, Wilhelm Solheim, and Robert Fox found these bangles on a visit to the Capuchin Mission Museum at Tilburg, Netherlands, courtesy of Father Gregorius van Boom. (For particulars of this interesting museum, see Harrison, in press.)

Nearly all of the island import ceramics came from mainland Asia (China, Thailand, Annam). This form gives a different impression. Nor can a Chinese parallel be found as yet. Moreover, the much commoner prehistoric blue and green glass bangles, regularly occurring in early metal situations in West Borneo (including the Niah Caves), probably came—like most older Southeast Asian glass—from well west of India and perhaps even inside the Mediterranean basin, rather than from the north (Harrison 1968b).

Both forms seem surprisingly fragile for their purpose, especially in the rough-and-tumble past of Dayak life. If anything these ceramic bangles are the more unsuitable. It is possible, therefore, that at *one* time large numbers were imported experimentally (maybe unsuccessfully) by people who certainly do love porcelain, stoneware, and earthenware in all forms. The identification of other specimens could very much illuminate the geographic spread of these bangles in the Asian and Pacific region.*

* Photographs were taken by Christine Harrison.

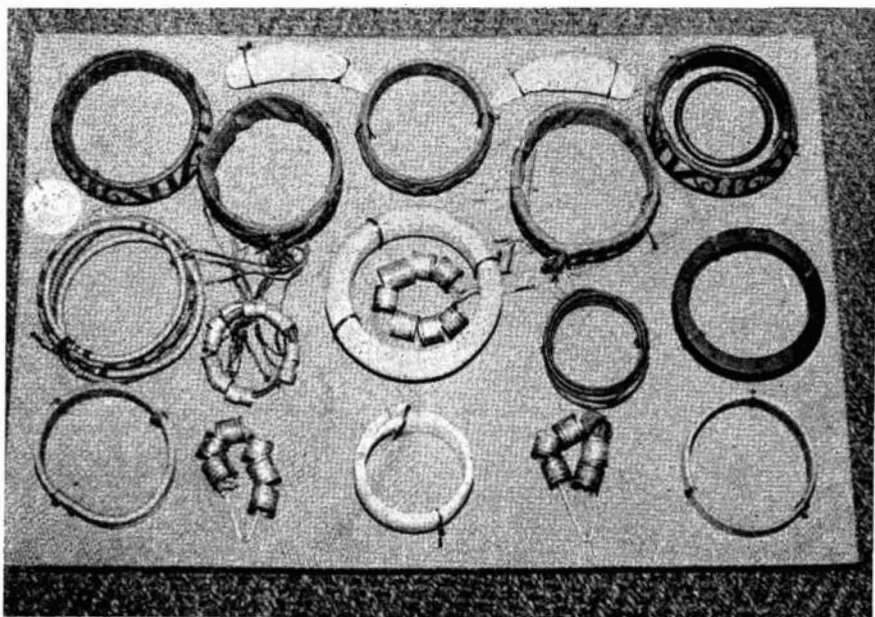


Plate I Two ceramic bangles (in the bottom picture, the white bracelet in the center) from the middle Kapuas River in southeastern Kalimantan, now in the Capuchin Mission Museum, Tilburg, Netherlands.

REFERENCES

HARRISSON, TOM

1968*a* A rare ceramic bangle from Borneo. *AP* 11: 135-136.

1968*b* New analyses of excavated prehistoric glass from Borneo. *AP* 11: 125-133.

In Press Stone carvings from Borneo in the Tilburg Museum, Holland. *JMBRAS* XLVI (2).